

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 000299

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/14/2014

TAGS: PREL IZ FR

SUBJECT: YAWER-CHIRAC MEETING HIGH ON ATMOSPHERICS, BUT LOW ON RESULTS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Alex Wolff, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Presidential Advisor for Middle East Andre Parant gave us a brief, but upbeat readout January 14 of President Chirac's meeting and working lunch with Iraqi Interim Government (IIG) President Ghazi al-Yawer January 13. (Note: Yawer met with FM Barnier and the President of the National Assembly Debre today and departs France January 15; we will seek MFA and Iraqi embassy readouts next week. End note.) Parant summed up the Yawer-Chirac discussions as having gone "very well," with very positive atmospherics but no significant operational results. According to Parant, Chirac was largely in listening mode, seeking Yawer's views on the current and longterm situation in Iraq. Yawer, meanwhile, presented himself as a true man of the people, as opposed to other political leaders who had spent most of their time in exile prior to the fall of Saddam's regime. Parant commented that the GoF found Yawer to be an articulate and impressive interlocutor and viewed him as representative of most Iraqis who want more independence and sovereignty, which the IIG President stressed would take time and require the continued presence of U.S. troops.

¶2. (C) Parant confirmed that Chirac reminded Yawer that the French offer to train Iraqi security forces (police) remained on the table; to this end, Chirac gave Yawer a letter on the French proposal and suggested that the Iraqi government send a mission to Paris to further discuss the issue. Yawer responded by taking note of the offer, and affirming that his government would study the idea. Explaining Yawer's limited response, Parant speculated that the Iraqi president may not have been previously aware of the French offer or was not in a position to act on it. He expressed hope that others in Yawer's delegation could pick up action on the training offer, which the GoF hoped would be met with an Iraqi response. Other points stressed by Chirac, according to Parant, included French readiness to help Iraq (no further specifics), GoF support for the political calendar and maintaining the January 30 election date, the GoF's support for the compromise reached on Iraq's Paris Club debt, and French readiness to participate in Iraq's reconstruction, within the limits posed by the difficult security situation.

¶3. (C) Parant described Yawer as realistic and sober on the current situation in Iraq, but optimistic on the medium to longterm. Yawer described the current situation as very difficult, with terrorists seeking to derail the political process, the borders porous to foreign infiltrators, and Iraq's neighbors, namely Syria and Iran, playing a negative role. Yawer criticized the CPA decision to dissolve the Iraqi army as responsible for many of the current security problems. At the same time, Yawer voiced optimism on prospects for elections and greater than expected Sunni participation. The Iraqi President told Chirac that rumors of a Sunni boycott were greatly exaggerated, with voter participation problems limited to one to two provinces in which terrorists -- not a boycott -- would keep voters at home. Yawer also stressed to Chirac his belief that Iraq was not headed towards civil war, and asserted that there was a prevailing Iraqi identity which prevailed over sectarian and ethnic divisions. Yawer also commented that there appeared to be two camps within Iraq's Shi'a community: those under the influence of Iran, and a much-larger group who favored a uniquely Iraqi, "lighter" version of Shi'ism.

¶4. (C) Parant noted that Chirac briefly raised the disappearance of French journalist Florence Aubenais, last seen in Baghdad January 5, and asked if the Iraqi government might have any information on her case. Parant said Yawer appeared to have concluded that Aubenais was being held hostage by criminals seeking a ransom, but this appeared to be more speculation than a conclusion based on proven information. (Note: The GoF is still not calling Aubenais case a kidnapping. End note.)

¶5. (C) Comment: Given the low-key manner in which the Yawer visit has taken place, more than one French daily has described the visit as a indicative of a "timid" French-Iraqi rapprochement. Though the Yawer visit was short on results, his presence here appears to have served a useful purpose in smoothing French dealings with the IIG just a few weeks before its dissolution. It also exposed the GoF to a more constructive assessment of the longterm situation in Iraq than that typically heard from French press or most French

officials. End comment.

16. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
Leach